

Global survey of 4,000 coronavirus patients supports link between COVID-19 and loss of smell and taste

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A massive, crowdsourced survey of COVID-19 patients from over 40 countries provides the greatest evidence to date of the link between

COVID-19 and the loss of smell, taste and chemesthesis—the ability to perceive cooling, tingling and burning sensations from stimulants such as chili peppers and menthol. These findings will eventually help to distinguish COVID-19 patients from those with common viral infections, such as the cold or flu, and help to prioritize the limited supply of COVID-19 tests.

Professor Masha Niv, Vice Dean at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Environment, is a leading member of the Global Consortium for Chemosensory Research (GCCR) which launched this survey on April 7, 2020. They mined the database on April 18 for initial findings and have posted their results on medRxiv.

Based on 4,039 COVID-19-positive participants from around the world, the GCCR found that smell, taste and chemesthesis are significantly reduced during the illness. Nasal blockage does not appear to be associated with these sense losses, suggesting that these symptoms may be an important way to distinguish COVID-19 infection from other viral infections.

"Our findings show that COVID-19 broadly impacts chemosensory function and is not limited to smell loss, and that disruption in these functions should be considered a possible indicator of COVID-19," explained Niv.

The ongoing survey asks participants diagnosed with COVID-19 to quantify their smell, taste and chemesthetic senses both before and during the illness, and to report any nasal blockages. This project is distinct from previous studies on chemosensory and COVID-19 in that it leverages a multinational, "open-science" approach. The survey is available in 27 languages, including English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, Arabic, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish. To date, over 30,000 responses have been crowdsourced through traditional

print, television, radio and social media.

"What's needed to fight a global pandemic is a global approach. That's what GCCR does best. We've harnessed scientists, clinicians and patients from around the world to give us a better understanding of the disease's impact on various populations and to provide us with significant clues towards better diagnosis and treatment of the COVID-19 disease," concluded Niv.

For information or to participate in the survey, log on to <https://gcchemosensr.org/surveys/>

More information: Valentina Parma et al. More than just smell - COVID-19 is associated with severe impairment of smell, taste, and chemesthesis, (2020). [DOI: 10.1101/2020.05.04.20090902](https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.05.04.20090902)

Provided by Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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